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TRANSCRIPT

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FACE THE NATION

Sunday, August 29, 1982

CBS Television Network, 11:30 AM - 12:00 Noon, EDT

and the

CBS Radio Network, 12:30 PM - 1:00 PM, EDT

GUEST:

ARIEL SHARON,
Israeli Defense Minister

CORRESPONDENTS:

George Herman, CBS News, Moderator
Lars-Erik Nelson, The New York Daily News
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MR. HERMAN: Minister Sharon, some incidents in the withdrawal or the evacuation or expulsion, as you like to call it, of the PLO forces from Beirut have not gone exactly according to the agreement. Do you consider what violations there have been to be serious, fairly serious, very serious?

MR. SHARON: I believe that the expulsion is going on. I think that we are living now in a very special moment, a very unique moment for all peace-loving people upon earth. I think there's going to be a change in the situation in the Middle East. And I believe the expulsion will go according to plan.

ANNOUNCER: From CBS News Washington a spontaneous and unrehearsed news interview on FACE THE NATION, with Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. General Sharon will be questioned by CBS Diplomatic Correspondent Robert Pierpoint; by Lars-Erik Nelson, Washington Bureau Chief for the New York Daily News; and by the Moderator CBS News Correspondent George Herman.

FACE THE NATION is produced by CBS News, which is solely responsible for the selection of today's guest and panel.

(Announcements.)

MR. HERMAN: Minister Sharon, in your first answer you talked about opportunities for the future. But first let me ask you whether you think by this action, by your encirclement of Beirut and forcing out of the PLO, the PLO has been shattered as a force that need concern Israel for the rest of -- forever?

MR. SHARON: I believe that what we have done, and Israel was I think the only and first country in the world that

decided not to go into any compromise with local, regional, or international terrorism. We understood the threat of terrorism not only because of the number of casualties that we suffered -- We suffered thousands of casualties throughout the years. But we regarded the PLO terrorism as a threat for the peace that we have already achieved and the main obstacle for future peace and peaceful coexistence with the Palestinian Arabs.

We have not been fighting the Palestinian people. We have been fighting the PLO terrorist organization, but not the Palestinian people. No doubt that there is a major change and we are facing a new era now. I believe that it will be possible now to renew the dialogue with the Palestinian Arabs. Myself, I conducted just a few days ago, again talked with Palestinian Arabs, inhabitants of Samaria and Judea in order to find a way for peaceful coexistence. So I believe that it'll be a change. Again one should understand that it's a complete changed situation when the PLO terrorist organizations were operating from Beirut, from Lebanon altogether like in a state within a state. We did not have any central government for many years or if they're going to be scattered now, in about eight Arab countries, that makes all the difference.

I do not say that that will bring an end to the existence of the PLO, but I believe that they were very heavily damaged and defeated militarily, and more than that, politically.

MR. NELSON: Do you see, sir, the prospect of any renewed fighting in the coming days ahead? Is there any threat that Israel now faces from Syria, from the PLO, from Lebanese leftists,

for example, that would oblige you to resume fighting?

MR. SHARON: We believe that in Beirut itself, though there are still all kind of leftist organizations armed and like the -- the Palestinian -- the PLO terrorists they have been equipped mostly and backed by the Soviets, financed mostly by the Saudi Arabians, they I think exist now about 27 different organizations, with total number of 7000 armed people. We know that the terrorists are planning to leave behind between 2000-3000 of the terrorists themselves of the organization in order to prepare the nucleus for maybe a future organization and activities. But I believe that for the first time now there is a chance that in Lebanon will be a central government and the duty of mopping up all these different militias and terrorist groups, that is the duty and the task of the Lebanese Government. They will have to do it. I believe that as about ourselves, we have finished our duty in Beirut, but by bringing this present situation of the expulsion of the main power of the terrorists and the Syrians from Beirut, they can go on now themselves.

And as about the other places in Lebanon, outside the presence of the Syrians, we believe that that should be done by negotiation and that is our position.

MR. PIERPOINT: Mr. Minister, how is that negotiation to be carried out? Will that be between the Israelis and the Syrians, or will it be with the United States participating? Tell me the details of how you see this working out in the next few weeks?

MR. SHARON: Altogether in the Middle East, we have

been eyewitnesses in the last five years for events that took place that nobody had ever dreamed about. I mean we had dreams about peace. We have been dreaming and talking about peace for so many years, but no one altogether saw how one day it would be that Prime Minister Begin will meet with the late President Sadat, and as a matter of fact it was not so easy because it's not only that we got support from our main ally, the United States. And we have to mention here that President Ceausescu from Romania was also took part in that. But it was I'll say a major effort of Prime Minister Begin, who I remember in the first Cabinet meeting after forming the Cabinet in July '77, when he said that he will make -- He will make a tremendous effort, the main effort, his main concentration will be upon bringing a situation that we'll be able to talk and discuss with Arab leaders, and that's happened.

MR. HERMAN: But let's look forward --

MR. SHARON: No doubt -- No doubt that the participation and help of our American friends, that had a substantial contribution to that. And I will say now again we are watching the situation that that all the achievements and the situation has been corrected in Lebanon, it's Israel that brought this to this situation of this major change which I would say bring a complete new era, which I believe bring to peace and peaceful coexistence, and again dialogue and encouragement to the peace process in the Middle East.

But again, when it came to the part of negotiations, of talks, the American participation was very important. So I

thought the kind of a combination I would say of Israeli acts taken, very courageous one, because we were really the only ones who decided to fight terrorism together with diplomatic actions taken by the -- the U.S. Administration.

MR. HERMAN: Mr. Minister, looking forward, which I think was the gist of Bob's question, do you anticipate that with PLO forces remaining in the north of Lebanon, with Syrian forces, do you anticipate, for example, that Ambassador Habib or some American representative will be a part of the negotiations to clear Lebanon for the Lebanese?

MR. SHARON: We are now after all -- We are watching now the -- of the expulsion from Beirut of the PLO terrorists. Now will come the second phase of the withdrawal of all the foreign troops and the terrorists from northern Lebanon and Syrians, which are still occupying more than 40 percent of the Lebanese territory and they have been occupying almost two-thirds of the Lebanese territory since January 1976.

MR. PIERPOINT: Well, that's our question. How are you going to get them out? That's basically what we're trying to get at.

MR. SHARON: Yes. That's what I'm trying -- What I'm trying to answer. I believe that it will be very important that our allies, the United States representatives which have been contributing to these negotiations will participate. And I believe that it should be a situation where one -- It should be clear that we, the Israelis, we want to move our troops home and we never had any intention to keep even one square inch of the Lebanese territory.

We will have to stay as long as the Syrians are staying there. That may be -- That by itself will be a kind of a pressure which will encourage or bring the Syrians to the decision that they have to leave.

MR. HERMAN: Do you expect Ambassador Habib, for one, to be part of negotiating the return of Syrian and Israeli forces step-by-step?

MR. SHARON: I've been working now with Ambassador Habib for a long time. I've known him for years now. Used to being Minister of Agriculture. Then we were discussing some other questions, mostly questions of water and development in the region. Now I've been talking to him and with him and negotiating for many weeks. I believe that that could be a very good -- very good solution, that altogether we do not interfere. We like the man. Sometimes we quarreled. It was not easy. It was not easy. It was a very complicated problem.

MR. HERMAN: But you would accept him as a negotiator for this second phase?

MR. SHARON: Yes. First of all, we are not interfering in any appointment by any other countries, but if it's up to us, of course I'll be very glad to continue to work with him.

MR. NELSON: Mr. Sharon, let me return to the question of Beirut for a second. There's a new President in Lebanon, Bashir Gemayel, who is closely associated with Israel. Does your government feel any obligation to protect or support Bashir Gemayel in the internal political struggles he may have in Lebanon?

MR. SHARON: We never interfered in internal problems in Lebanon. We -- As a matter of fact, we never interfered in any internal problems of any other country. It's against --

MR. HERMAN: But you did arm one side.

MR. NELSON: You did support Major Haddad in the south.

MR. SHARON: We were the only ones that came to the rescue of the Christians in Lebanon while you gentlemen did not say a word about that, and you know very well that since 1975 when the PLO terrorists attacked the Maronites and then the Syrians invaded Lebanon in January 1976, the casualties in Lebanon were about 110,000 people killed, mostly Christians, and then before the last war in Lebanon. And these casualties caused by the PLO terrorists and by the -- and by the Syrians. And there were more than 300,000 wounded. As a matter of fact, you don't -- You never said a word about that and I'll say -- I'm not blaming you. We --

MR. NELSON: What I'm asking, sir, is do you feel that you should go in and rescue them again if they get in that kind of trouble again?

MR. SHARON: But I'm not blaming you for that. I'm not blaming you. We -- We are -- We being a small nation in the Middle East, a minority, a nation of 3 1/2 million, living in a small, tiny country, and understanding the threats when you are surrounded by hatred. We felt then that we have to come to their rescue, and we helped them. We saved the lives -- Altogether, we saved lives. We don't want anything for that. We did it only because we felt, we felt so well the meaning of being small, persecuted minority.

Therefore, we help them. Nobody else did and we saved them.

But now it's a different situation now. The Syrians, I hope, will be withdrawn from Lebanon. The PLO terrorists with their political and military headquarters are now in -- the terms of -- of expulsion. They are going to be leaving. And I believe that there is a unique chance now for the Lebanese Government -- And again, we do not interfere. We did not interfere and we --

MR. HERMAN: Would you assist?

MR. SHARON: We assisted --

MR. HERMAN: No. Would you assist the new government to help it?

MR. SHARON: We will -- We will be willing -- I think as a matter of fact, it should be one of the main targets of the United States because I believe that -- I believe that we are facing a peace treaty with Lebanon.

MR. PIERPOINT: Have they asked for one? Has President Gemayel asked you to sign a peace treaty with him?

MR. SHARON: No. I would like just to with your permission to finish my sentence. We have been -- We have been -- I think we are facing now a situation where we are going to have a peace treaty with Lebanon. This triangle of peace -- Jerusalem, Cairo, Beirut -- makes all the situation in the Middle East different. I would say the Americans now are becoming much stronger and that, of course, strengthening the Free World. The Soviets are becoming much weaker. So I believe that first of all that should be the duty of this country to support and help. If we will be asked

by the Government of Lebanon to ask -- to support them, no doubt we'll support. But we will not interfere. But --

MR. HERMAN: Would you help train, for example, the Lebanese Army, which is in bad difficulties?

MR. SHARON: If we will be asked by legitimate government of Lebanon to support, we will support.

MR. PIERPOINT: Mr. Sharon, my question was, and I have a follow-up question. My question was has President Gemayel asked Israel to sign a peace treaty, or is that only Israel's idea?

MR. SHARON: The President-elect Bashir Gemayel is not yet in office. He takes there one month. He hasn't formed a government yet. Altogether the situation in Lebanon is very complicated. Only one who knows Lebanon well and -- to know Lebanon well and can appreciate the difficulties to form a government there. And so I think the first thing is to -- I would say is to come into the office as the President, then to form a government. And I believe that that will be one of the subjects that will be discussed between Israel and Lebanon. As I said, it was the phase of expulsion of the terrorists. Now it's the phase of the withdrawal of all the foreign troops. And the third phase will be the phase of peace and the needed security arrangement along the northern border of Israel. And I hope that we'll come to peace with Lebanon. Lebanon will be the second Arab country which will sign a peace agreement with Israel.

MR. PIERPOINT: I'd like to ask you, the view of some

American officials is that phase two is going to be a very, very long phase. And you yourself have brought up the complicated situation in Lebanon. Is it not possible that Lebanon is going to be permanently partitioned between Israel and Syria?

MR. SHARON: I hope not. In any case, that is not our intention. I believe that the interests of all of us should be that Lebanon will be a free, independent country ruled by one central government, and all the foreign troops should leave Lebanon, and that is the interest of all of us, to have Lebanon as part of Free World. It's important for all of us.

MR. HERMAN: Before we get away from phase one, I just want to ask you, Minister Sharon, you've been a soldier, a fighting man since you were 14 years old. Would you tell me very briefly your impression of American weapons versus Soviet weapons as they were shown up in this attack?

MR. SHARON: We have been using American weapons. I would like to emphasize we have been using American weapons, though so many things have been said about that, exactly according the laws and regulations that these weapons were sold to us.

MR. HERMAN: Well, I don't want to get into a legal argument; I want to get into a military discussion.

MR. SHARON: But one takes advantage, you know, sometimes.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Well, don't take advantage of me, tell me what you think about --

MR. SHARON: Okay. I think it's important because, you

know, so many things have been said about that, so I made it clear.

I think that the American weapon is a very good weapon. I think that the American weapon was given in very good, into very good hands, and that's the hands of the Israeli soldiers. We are a small nation, highly motivated. We may know, understand the importance of peace, security existence.

MR. HERMAN: Well, was it weapons that made the difference or the skill of Israeli fighters?

MR. SHARON: I would say -- I would say our -- We are always asked what is your secret weapon. So we say our secret weapon is more than everything is our -- is our soldiers. And we have -- There are many countries using the title of having a people's army, but we are really having a people's army. Most of our troops are reserves. Most of the troops that have been fighting in Lebanon came from the farm, from I would say from the industries, from school, and so on. I think they are highly motivated and highly skilled soldiers. But in the same time I would like to say that the American weapon and without -- I wouldn't like to underestimate the Soviet weapon. We should not underestimate. But I think that the American weapon is a very good weapon, one that's used by good, skilled, highly motivated soldiers.

MR. NELSON: Mr. Sharon --

MR. SHARON: Beside that -- What we meant is very important. One of the contributions I think of Israel to the Free World as a result of this war and that's the byproducts, not more than a byproduct. That's not -- That was not the reason to going to

war. We managed to learn so many lessons now out of this war. And I think we managed to solve some of the most complicated problems. For example, fields that were regarded to be almost unsolved, like the question of surface-to-air missile systems and so on, we solved it. And I think all that is also will be a contribution to the Free World.

MR. NELSON: Mr. Sharon, you talked about renewing the conversation you had with Palestinian leaders. I just wonder what you expect to offer them in terms of autonomy and do you think that Israel should annex the West Bank?

MR. SHARON: We make it very clear that we do not want to annex the West Bank. As a matter of fact, we haven't. We offered an autonomy, the autonomy plan which was our own proposal. Nobody pressured us to offer this plan. This plan gives the Arab population, the Arab inhabitants of Samaria, Judea and Gaza district the possibility to run their own lives. It's not a Palestinian state. I would say that's the kind of a peaceful coexistence which will enable them to run most of the spheres of life almost without any interference when Israel is going to keep in its hands the security, which is for us a question of death and life. Altogether, I believe that will open a new, a new situation in the relations between Jews and Arabs in general. You have to know that Israel -- Israel is known for its military capability, but Israel should be known maybe more for its achievements in agriculture. We have developed the most sophisticated farm and agricultural. We have developed the most sophisticated science -- health, hospitals, schools and so on.

And I believe that all of that contribute.

MR. NELSON: But are you saying that the Palestinians should live as part of a province of Israel, or if Israel retains some sort of security hold that means that Israel really controls the territory.

MR. SHARON: What I said is that -- What we offered was not a state, was not an independent state.

MR. NELSON: Is it a province?

MR. SHARON: There is a -- There is a Palestinian state -- You know, when we look at this map here, look at this map here, altogether all this area was once Palestine, all that area. That is what is Jordan now, which consists of 75 percent of the total area where most -- and that is Israel. And that includes the West Bank, which I'm -- I'm not referring now to the political solution.

But the majority of the Palestinians are living in Jordan. Jordan, as a matter of fact, is a Palestinian state. So we are not planning to -- to establish a second Palestinian state. There is a Palestinian state. What we are talking about is a way of peaceful coexistence between us and the Palestinian Arabs enabling them to conduct their own life and looking forward I would say for peace in Egypt and with Jordan and with the rest of the Arab world.

MR. HERMAN: I have to conduct this program and we're out of time. Thank you very much, Minister Sharon, for being our guest.

MR. SHARON: Thank you.

MR. HERMAN: And we'll have a word about next week's

guest in a moment.

(Announcements.)

ANNOUNCER: Today on FACE THE NATION Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon was interviewed by CBS News Diplomatic Correspondent Robert Pierpoint; by Lars-Erik Nelson, Washington Bureau Chief for the New York Daily News; and by the Moderator, CBS News Correspondent George Herman.

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Next week, the Secretary of Labor, Raymond Donovan, will FACE THE NATION.

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